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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (8/07): A call for public and civil society action

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Main Stories:  
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The summit between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas on August 6 in Jerusalem dominates the front pages of the dailies. The headlines in all three dailies announce that Abbas and Olmert confirmed their intention to keep meeting and negotiating, and that Israel has decided to release 150 Palestinian prisoners on August 25. The headline in Al-Hayat Al-Jadida also adds, "Israeli sources confirmed that the release of the Fatah leader Marwan Al-Barghouthi is amongst the options," but noted that no decisions have been taken yet in this regard. In its coverage, Al-Ayyam quotes Palestinian Chief Negotiator Sa'eb Erekat as having said, after the Abbas-Olmert meeting on August 6 in Jerusalem, that Israel agreed in principle to resolve the issue of the 22,000 Palestinian residents without identity cards and agreed to issue one thousand permits to those living abroad without identity cards to return to the Palestinian Territories to get their cards.

All dailies express outrage over a "dangerous precedent" set by the Israeli Supreme Court in its decision, announced on Israeli radio on August 6, that the PA does not have immunity against compensation lawsuits filed by Israelis. The Israeli Supreme Court thus overturned a previous decision, issued by the Israeli Central Court in Jerusalem in 2006, that the Palestinian Authority is considered a state and is thus immune from lawsuits. The Israeli Supreme Court's decision came in response to an appeal filed by a religious school at the Alon Moreiya settlement, requesting the implementation of another court's decision against a "Palestinian Authority person" regarding a land case.

Coverage in all dailies highlights that on August 6, Israel released

five Palestinian prisoners according to the prisoner's exchange deal agreed to on July 16 with Hezbollah. The lead photo in Al-Quds shows the released prisoners walking towards a checkpoint in Tulkarem and a smaller front-page photo in Al-Ayyam shows them making a "V" sign for victory. In other coverage, Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida write that on August 6, Israel released Hamas members Adli Ya'ish and Issa Al-Ja'bari, following the payment of 7000 NIS in bail.

Al-Quds, citing the official Palestine News Agency WAFA, writes that the EU announced on August 6 that it has pledged 14.7 million euros to assist the Palestinian government in paying the salaries of approximately 74,000 employees.

Al-Quds reports that in a statement issued on August 6, Hamas announced that it would allow the reopening of all the civil institutions that were closed in the wake of the Gaza beach explosion. In related coverage, the leader of Islamic Jihad reportedly said in an interview with the Qatar-based Al-Sharq Al-Qatariya newspaper published on August 6 that there are intensive efforts ongoing to release the prisoners arrested by Fatah and Hamas.

Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida report that in a statement issued by his office on August 6, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak ordered the demolition of the house of Hisham Abu Dheim, who executed the attack against the Jewish religious institute Merkaz Harav in West Jerusalem in March 2008 in which 8 Israelis were killed and 10 injured. Abu Dheim's house is located in the Jabal Al-Mukabber neighborhood in East Jerusalem.

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Citing an AFP story, Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida relate that according to a statement by the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, the Israeli military discharged the Israeli soldier who gave the order to shoot a Palestinian with his hands tied behind his back in Ni'lin village near Ramallah on July 7.

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BLOCK QUOTES:  
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¶1. Independent Al-Quds runs an editorial entitled, "Where is the role of the public...?" (8/07): "The tragic situation in which we [Palestinians] live is characterized by three signs:

- The first sign is the destructive bloody conflict for authority and the preference of narrow group interests over the public national interests.

- The second is the absence of true leadership capable of imposing its decisions and respect...and of convincing the public to accept its opinions.

- The third sign: the near-total absence of the role of the public and civil society at a time when we are in need of such a role.

Why don't the angry public ... [and] the civil society...that talks about human rights...and the political organizations that are standing between Fatah and Hamas...take action? This is the time to work, and this is the time to show capacities and qualifications to act before we drown in the catastrophe we are facing ... We suggest or request everyone to take action...starting in Ramallah and the Gaza Strip ... All negative criticism and vain expressions of pain should stop. The public should act and tell all these fighters [Fatah and Hamas] to stop and fear God ... We should not allow the slaughter of the remains of our [Palestinian] cause and of our homeland while we sit and watch...!!!"

WALLES